Consumer Expenditure Survey
CNSTAT Panel Briefing

Survey Design & Data Collection
Adam Safir
Division of Consumer Expenditure Survey, BLS
February 8, 2011
Outline

- Survey Design
  - Interview Survey
  - Diary Survey
- Data Collection
  - Role of the Census Bureau
  - Interviewing
  - Response Rates
Interview Survey

- Designed to collect expenditures for large or less frequently purchased items that can be recalled in a quarterly interview, or things that Rs make regular monthly payments on
- Housing units are selected for sample; Consumer units are identified within housing units
- Each unit is interviewed 5 times
- Rotating panel design to smooth workflow
Interview Survey, cntd.

- **Instrument:**
  - Paper and pencil survey until 2003
  - Converted to Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) in 2003

- **Mode:**
  - Primarily personal visit, but some decentralized telephone collection (~33%)

- **Interview Length:**
  - 60-minute average
Interview 1

- Establish reference person and HH roster
- Identify consumer units (CUs):
  - Anyone related to reference person by blood, marriage, unmarried partner, other legal arrangement
  - Other individuals or groups of related individuals may form additional CUs
  - Others who share spending on housing, food and other expenses
Interview 1: Consumer Units

- Composition may change over time
- Can move in or out of housing unit
- Students living away-from-home, in student housing, are separate Cus
Interview 1: Data Collected

- Demographic information for each CU member
- Housing characteristics:
  - e.g., type of structure, number of rooms, fuels used, year built, etc.
- Inventory of appliances and equipment:
  - e.g., stove, refrigerator, washer, dryer, computer, etc.
- Expenditures:
  - One month recall for all expenditure categories
  - Used for bounding purposes
Interview 1: Data Collected, contd.

- Detailed information on:
  - Owned Properties - description, current value, existing mortgages, home equity loans, payments
  - Vehicles – year, make, model, financing info for owned/leased
  - Health insurance – insurer, type, who pays
  - Non-health insurance – type (e.g., life, property, auto), pymt schedule

- Data are carried forward to Interview 2-5, and updated for disposals and new purchases
Interviews 2-5

- Updates to inventoried items:
  - Properties, vehicles, insurance, etc.
- Expenditures, descriptions, and other information for the previous 3 months for most expenditure categories
## Interviews 2-5: Expenditure Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent</td>
<td>Household services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>Educational expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home maintenance &amp; repairs</td>
<td>Child care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major appliances</td>
<td>Trips and vacations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor appliances</td>
<td>Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household furnishings</td>
<td>Cash contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical expenses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interviews 2-5: Expense Patterns for Other Items (detail collected in diary)

- Usual weekly expenses for groceries
- Usual monthly expense for:
  - alcoholic beverages
  - mass transit to go to work, school, and other places
Interviews 2 & 5

- Work experience and income for each CU member 14+
- Income for the CU as a whole
- Credit liability
- Interview 5
  - Change in assets
Diary Survey

- Designed to collect detailed data on small frequently purchased items which may be difficult to recall in a quarterly interview

- Daily diary, with 4 parts:
  - Food for home consumption, Food away from home, Apparel, Other
Diary Survey, cntd.

- Each week of the year has equal representation
- Diaries must be placed within 7 days of “earliest placement date”
- Each Diary week is treated separately for estimation purposes
Each CU completes two consecutive 7-day Diaries with three personal visits

- **1st visit**
  - Collect demographic information place week 1 Diary
- **2nd visit**
  - Diary check and recall place Diary 2
- **3rd visit**
  - Diary check and recall collect income information
Role of the Census Bureau

- Develops sample of housing units
  - Drawn from the decennial census of addresses
- Programs CAPI instruments
  - Including edits, according to BLS specifications
- Collects data
  - Under Title 13
Interview
- CAPI data transmitted to Census HQ, where they copy data needed for next quarter’s instrument (properties, vehicles, etc.)

Diary
- Check-in, keying, coding, imaging operations in Jeffersonville, IN

Monthly data are transmitted to BLS
Census Bureau: Regional Offices

- Decentralized data collection
- Conducted by the Census Bureau through its 12 ROs
- RO responsibilities vary in geographic scope, e.g.:
  - New York RO: 19 counties
  - Denver RO: 10 states
  - Los Angeles RO: Hawaii, Southern California
Interviewing

- **Interview Survey**
  - Multiple contacts *may be* required
- **Diary Survey**
  - Multiple contacts *are* required
- **Contact History Instrument (CHI)**
  - Part of both surveys
  - Data on nature and outcome of contact
  - Concerns of reluctant respondents
  - Source of detailed information about the survey process
Interviewing: Mode

- CE interview survey is designed to be conducted in person

- Approximately 33% of interviews are conducted by telephone
  - Policies recently updated to provide guidelines for telephone interviewing

- Barriers to personal interviews
  - Controlled access building and gated communities
  - Severe weather conditions (e.g., blizzard)
  - Respondent request for telephone interview
CE Response Rates, 2000-2010
Achieving Response Rate Goals

- BLS and Census have worked together to improve response rates through:
  - Incentives test
  - Better data collection instruments
    - User-friendly diary
    - Improvements to CAPI content and operation
  - Improved field materials
    - Promotional materials about the surveys
    - Translating advance letters into Spanish and other languages
    - Revised and updated Information Book
  - More focused FR training